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THE UN-TRAVERSED MARGIN

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Abstract

The most awaited dawn of Indian Independence, along with the gaiety of freedom also brought the gloom of Partition of Indian sub-continent in 1947. The Political and geographical Partition was succeeded by religious fanatism which resulted in unprecedented dance of death and destruction. The religious turbulence threw millions of people haywire across the borders. Women were the victims and the worst sufferers in this communal vendetta of Men to seek revenge on one another. This aspect of the suffering is much focussed to criticise the 'other religion'. Unfortunately, the suffering induced on Women by the Men of their own community in the guise of 'protectors', is rarely spoken and recorded. Saadat Hasan Manto recorded this untraversed truth of the suffering afflicted on women in the short story 'Open It' (Khol Do). Therefore this paper attempts to speak about this unspoken savagery plagued on Women during the Partition of the Indian Sub-continent.

Key Words- *Partition, Holocaust, Fratricide, Religious affiliations, Trauma*

The event of Partition of Indian sub-continent can be undoubtedly termed as a holocaust, an event of unprecedented magnitude and horror. History has not known a fratricidal war of such dimensions in which human hatred and bestial passions were degraded to the levels witnessed during the dark epoch when religious frenzy, taking the shape of a hideous monster, stalked through cities, towns and countryside, talking a toll of half a million innocent lives. Collins and

lapierre quote a testimony of Captain Atkins of the British army in *Freedom at Midnight (1976)*, "every yard of the way there was a body, some butchered, some dead of cholera". (p.444). Decrepit old men, defenceless women, helpless young children, infants in arms, by the thousands, were brutally done to death by religious fanatics of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities. To be a Hindu, Sikh, or a Muslim became a crime punishable with death. Madness swept over the entire land, in an ever increasing crescendo, till reason and sanity left the minds of rational men and women, and sorrow, misery, hatred; despair took possession of their souls. The communal nature of violence has made people of religious groups in India suspicious of each other that from time to time flare up in many communal riots. One may say that the legacy of partition still continues as a residual factor of history as reflected in these communal riots. Partition was not about the division of a geographical territory, it was also Partition of hearts that did not heal as yet. The violence that was unleashed during partition and migration of communities was massive and the worst suffers were the women and children especially women of all communities were at the receiving end. Women suffered violence in its most brutal forms- abduction, rape, kidnap, forced marriage, honour killing etc. The male of both the communities took revenge by committing most barbarous crimes on the womenfolk of the opposite community. Litterateurs of both the nations captured this tumultuous event in all genres of Literature which led to emergence of a new genre in Literature known as the Partition Literature. Many works, especially short stories accurately narrated the agony of women who underwent heart wrenching physical, psychological and emotional suffering in the hands of men of other religions. Prominent short stories depicting the anguish of women are *Lajwanti* by Rajendra Singh Bedi, *Pakistan Zindabad* by Kartar Singh Duggal, *Exile* by Jamila Hashmi, *Revenge* by Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, *Cold Meat* by Saadat Hasan Manto, *Kulsum* by Kartar Singh Duggal etc. These stories depicted the physical, psychological and emotional trauma faced by women in the hands of men of other religion which was the most accepted and discussed fact during the Partition. The story *Lajwanti*, depicts the emotional suffering of Lajo, who return to her husband Sundarlal in the process of government's recovery and rehabilitation of the Lost women. She desperately struggled to tell her side of story to Sunderlal but Sunderlal always shrank from her and she longed for an ear who could listen to her story. The story ends with a sad end where a man fails to understand the point of view of woman sufferings. Kartar Singh Duggal's short story *Kulsum* depicts the story of a young girl who is confined by an old Sikh man to offer her as a gift

to the young school master. The schoolmaster felt that the gift was fit to be swallowed. When she poses resistance, she is first raped by the old man and then handed over to the school master. *Revenge* by Khwaja Ahmad Abbas narrates about an irrational desire of revenge by a father, Hari Das, who pledged to stab a Muslim girl in her breasts to avenge the brutal killing of her daughter Sita. Thus almost all the narrative in the genre of Partition Literature depicted the trauma of women unleashed by the men of 'other religion' throwing the blame on the religious affiliation of the Women.The unspoken truth of the atrocities committed on women which was unexplored by most of the literary and historical writings is the crime of rapes done on them by the men of their own religion and community. The men who were overpowered by lust and desire used religion as an "ethical pretext" to fulfill their desires and this physical lust knew no boundaries and distinction of religion, region and even relationships. The perspective of women being physically assaulted by the men of their own religion which was unrecorded in the literary classifications was presented by Saadat Hasan Manto in his short story *Open It (Khol Do)* and also in his collection of vignettes titled *Black margins.* Therefore this paper attempts to throw light on this un-traversed margin of the Partition enormity which was meted out on Women from the short story *Open It (Khol Do)* by Saadat Hasan Manto. It is undeniable that Manto's most powerful stories dealt with the theme of Partition of India and its aftermath. *Toba Tek Singh, Cold meat, Open It, Saha'e and Black Margins*, all depicted the unbearable anguish, trauma and savagery of Partition. Manto, the man and the writer, was shattered by this cataclysmic event. He was internally divided, and the breach that was caused was never to be filled. M.U.Memon (2001) in his book *Black Margins* which is a collection of stories by Saadat Hasan Manto, quotes from the autobiography of Manto regarding his mental condition,When I sat down to write I found y mind in a confused state. How much ever I tried, I could not separate India from Pakistan or Pakistan from India. My mind was invaded by the same puzzling questions again and again; will the literature of Pakistan be different? If so how? Who has the claim to what was written in undivided India? Will that be divided as well? (p.29)While other writers on Partition employed narrative strategy that depended on the all too familiar "balancing act" (Memon, 2001, p.29) between different forms of communal violence, Manto's stories look at the violence and barbarity of partition as a plain and simple descent into the heart of darkness inherent in Man. "he stares violence in the face" comments Memon. (2001, p.29) *Open it!* revolve around two main characters: Sirajudin and his seventeen years old daughter Sakina. Sakina was lost on their

way to Mughalpura from Amritsar. Sirajudin meets eight self-appointed young social workers (volunteers) of his community during his search for his daughter and implores them to trace her. Each day he prayed for the success of those young volunteers who reassured Sirajuddin that if his daughter was alive they would bring her with them. Several days passed, but there was no trace of Sakina. One day the volunteers see a girl on a roadside who start running, startled by the sound of the lorry. They run behind her and catch her and slowly confirm her as Sakina. They were kind to her and feed her with milk and give her clothes. But even after several days Sirajuddin didn't hear the news of his daughter and on questioning the young men one day, who promised to locate Sakina, they assured him of finding her and leave. One day a girl was carried to the doctor's camp from a nearby railway line where she was lying unconscious. Sirajuddin recognises her as Sakina. The doctor pointed to the window and said to him. "Open It. The body stirred slightly on the stretcher. The lifeless hands untied the waistband. And lowered the Shalwar. "She is alive! My daughter's alive!" Old Sirajuddin shouted with joy. The doctor broke into a cold sweat". (Memon, 2001, p.203) . She was subjected to successive rape by the volunteers belonging, ironically enough, to her own community. The oft repeated rape forces her to be so attuned to the phrase "Open it" that she unties the chord for her pyjamas on hearing the doctor say open it where he meant to open the window. She had been so brutalised that her relationship with language became so tenuous that the phrase "Khol Do" (Open It) carried just one meaning for her. "The ending of the story" analyses Menon in his introduction to the book, "stands as a telling epitaph to the death of civilised norms". (Memon, 2001, p.31) The fact that Sakina's immediate tormentors were, in all probability, Muslims themselves adds another poignant dimension to the study of different dimensions of the agony that women underwent during the Holocaust of Partition The same subject can be found in a vignette from *Black Margins*, originally named as *Siyah Hasiye* which narrates a barbaric act of Man's lust towards women which had no moral and ethical distinctions. The story of *Raw Deal* narrates about how two friends whose first intension was the fulfilment of their lustful cravings but not the wish or even the identity of women. Two friends pooled their resources. They selected a girl from a group of ten or twenty and bought her for forty rupees. After having spent the night with her, one of them asked, "What's your name?" The man was furious when he heard the girl's name. "We were told that you belong to the other religious community!" You were told a lie," the girl

replied. The man ran to his friend and said, "That bastard double crossed us. He palmed off one of our girls! Come on, let's take her back. (Memon, 2001, p.185)

Conclusion- Thus the short story *Open It*, could present the physical and emotional upheaval not only of Sakina, but also of those thousands of girls whose suffering went unnoticed and unrecorded even in the master narrative of the Partition Literature. Saadat Hasan Manto could bravely bring out this unspoken viewpoint of the trauma which women had undergone during the Partition with its stark realities which leaves the reader aghast and ashamed of the bestiality of their predecessors. This dimension of the story *Open It* testifies and re affirms the fact that in times of fratricidal war and violence, the female body became a contested site subject to assault and conquest. It serves as a blot on the collective identity of the humanity. Jason Fransisco, in his article *In the Heat of Fratricide, The Literature of India's Partition Burning Freshly*, incorporated by Mushirul Hasan (2000) in his book "Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics and the partition of India", concludes that "the subject of Partition was first the human being, not the Hindu human being, nor the Muslim, nor the Sikh. The experience of each community distinctly mirror one another, indeed they reach out to and clutch at one another. No crime, no despair, no grief in exile belongs uniquely to anyone". (p.394) This conclusion holds true with the distressing and poignant condition of Women during the Fratricidal environment of Partition.

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